



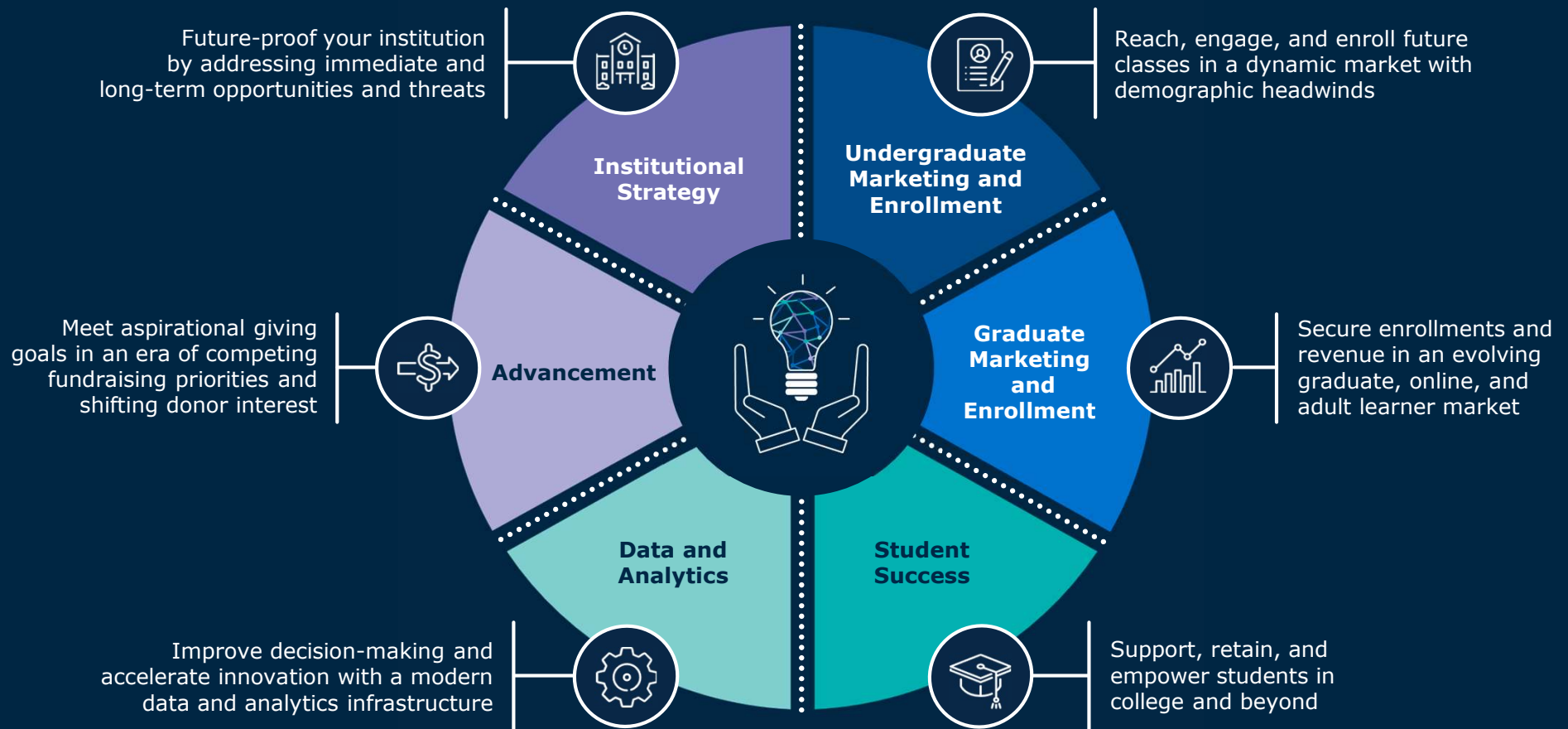
EAB

Navigating Upheaval, Building Agility

The State of Canadian Higher Education and the Role of
York's IT Community

York University IT Community
Session

Insight-Powered Solutions for Your Top Priorities and Toughest Challenges



We partner with **2,800+** institutions to accelerate progress, deliver results, and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.

Your Facilitator Today...



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Why This Conversation, Why Now

Four forces are converging on higher education, and on the work of IT

1 Financial pressure

Revenue is compressing while costs stay rigid, so every service has to earn its place.

2 Public expectations

Governments and the public want measurable returns, transparency and accountability.

3 Student and workforce

Learners and employers expect digital-first service and graduates ready for a changing job market.

4 Artificial intelligence

Fast-moving and everywhere: an opportunity and a risk that institutions are still learning to manage well.

Today's arc

The sector under pressure

What it means for York IT

How we build agility together



A Sector Under Pressure

Finances, public trust, and enrolment

PART

1

Outlier or Prophecy?



Laurentian's Collapse Was An Extreme Outcome of Shared Structural Risks



5.7% drop in FTE students, 2015-2019; loss of Saudi Arabian intl students in 2018



Sector-Wide Risk:

Demographic softness and competition
destabilizing cross-subsidies



10% tuition cut and multi-year freeze in Ontario in 2019



Sector-Wide Risk:

High exposure to provincial **policy and funding shocks**



3.6X increase in debt from capital spending, 2010-2020; no viable repayment plans



Sector-Wide Risk:

Mounting backlog of **critical infrastructure projects**



Operating deficits in **8 of 10** fiscal years, 2011-2020; masked by one-time measures



Sector-Wide Risk:

Rigid cost structures amid constrained revenue growth



Unwieldy board, ill-equipped for needed financial oversight and intervention



Sector-Wide Risk:

Weak and/or misaligned **governance and accountability structures**

Few Institutions Remain Immune to Sector-Wide Pressures

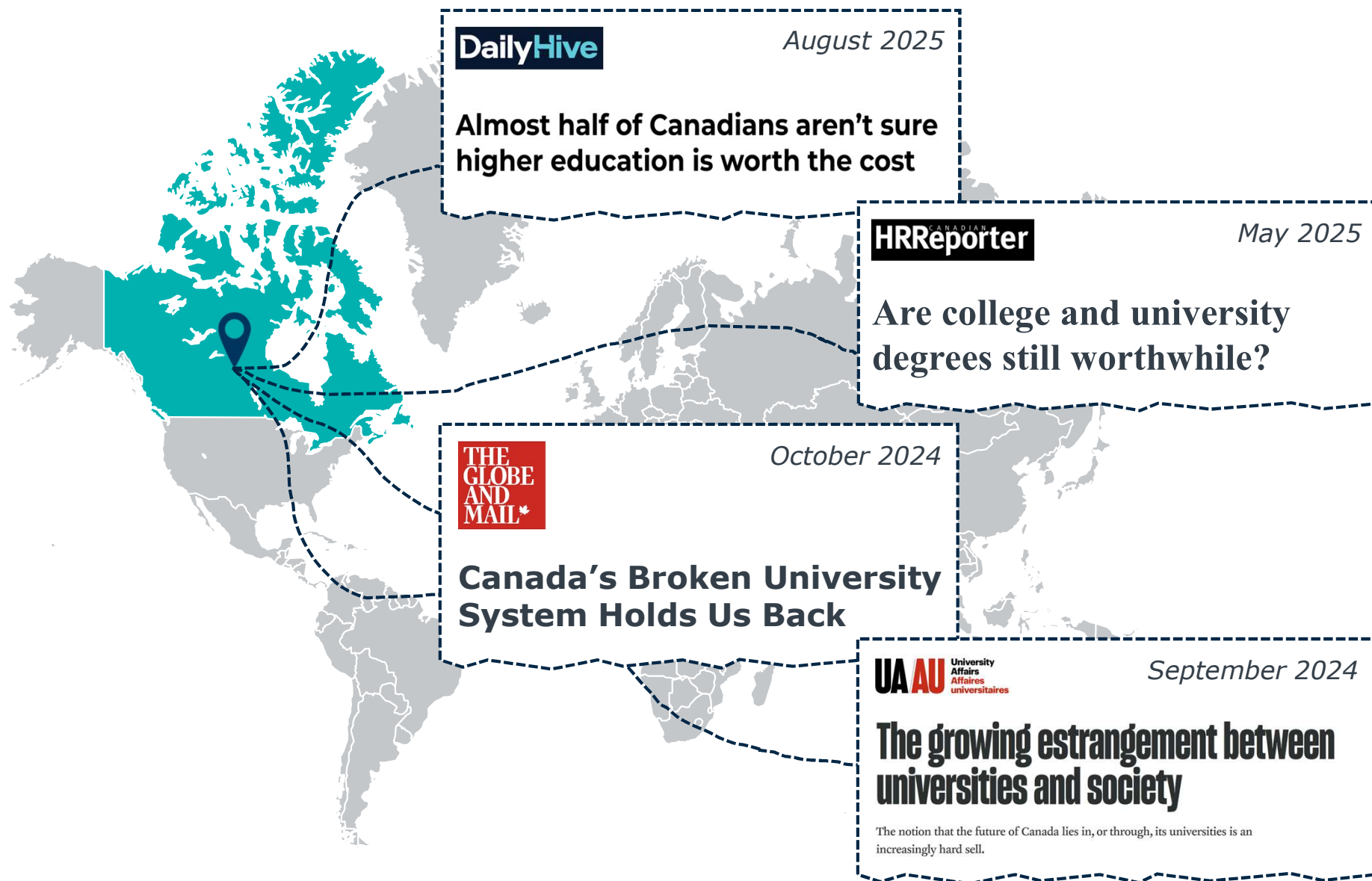
"I've been a president for 25 years...I've never seen a **more difficult time** or a time where the fundamental operating assumption of institutions has been **more under threat**."

—President, Large Research University

Canada Not Immune From Growing Value Scrutiny



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DailyHive

August 2025

Almost half of Canadians aren't sure higher education is worth the cost

HRReporter

May 2025

Are college and university degrees still worthwhile?

**THE
GLOBE
AND
MAIL**

October 2024

Canada's Broken University System Holds Us Back

UA AU University Affairs
Affaires universitaires

September 2024

The growing estrangement between universities and society

The notion that the future of Canada lies in, or through, its universities is an increasingly hard sell.

Source: Canadian HR Reporter, [Are College and University Degrees Still Worthwhile?](#); Daily Hive, [Almost Half of Canadians Aren't Sure Higher Education Is Worth the Cost](#); The Globe and Mail, [Canada's Broken University System](#); University Affairs, [The Growing Estrangement](#); EAB interviews and analysis.

Provincial Plans Point to a New Phase of PSE¹ Policy

Alberta and British Columbia Taking a More Active Hand in PSE Policy



Plans Signal a Reset in the Terms of Public Support



Alberta Expert Panel (Sept. 2025)

- Redesign funding model to include a **performance-based component**
- Give institutions **autonomy over student tuition rates**
- Remove **regulatory constraints** that prevent innovation and efficiency
- Advocate for **institutional neutrality**



BC Government Review (Nov. 2025)

- Examine **governance and operations** to improve efficiency
- Improve **program delivery** by aligning graduate skills with labour market needs
- Identify actions to **support financial sustainability** (e.g., adjusting funding models)



Alignment with provincial economic priorities becomes a prerequisite of support



Funding is tied to meeting regional and provincial workforce needs



Incentives favor coordination and efficiency over competition (e.g., eliminating duplicative programs)



Performance expectations extend beyond access to outcomes (e.g., research, student experience)



Greater institutional agility is expected in exchange for reduced regulation

1) Post-Secondary Education.

Synchronized Compression Hits Campus Budgets



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Institutional Revenues

Source	Outlook	Pressures
Tuition & fees		<i>Intl student caps; demographic headwinds; ROI skepticism</i>
Government funding		<i>Declining public spending per PSE student</i>
Auxiliaries		<i>Rising operating costs compress margins</i>
Private gifts		<i>Donor fatigue; corporate giving shifts to applied research; inflation eroding gift value</i>
Investment returns		<i>Market volatility and higher interest rates reduce net returns</i>
Private grants & contracts		<i>Greater funding uncertainty; increased provincial emphasis on commercialization</i>

Institutional Expenses

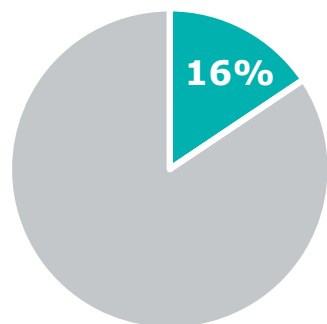
Source	Outlook	Pressures
Instruction		<i>Salary growth outpacing revenue; static workload and delivery models</i>
Academic & student support		<i>High labour costs; rising demand for high-touch student support</i>
Institutional support		<i>Escalating compliance, legal, technology costs</i>
Research & public service		<i>High-cost infrastructure; diminishing institutional ROI</i>
Auxiliaries		<i>Inflation and labour-cost pressures; limited pricing flexibility</i>
Financial aid		<i>Waning federal/provincial student support; rising institutional aid obligations</i>

An Overreliance on International Pipelines

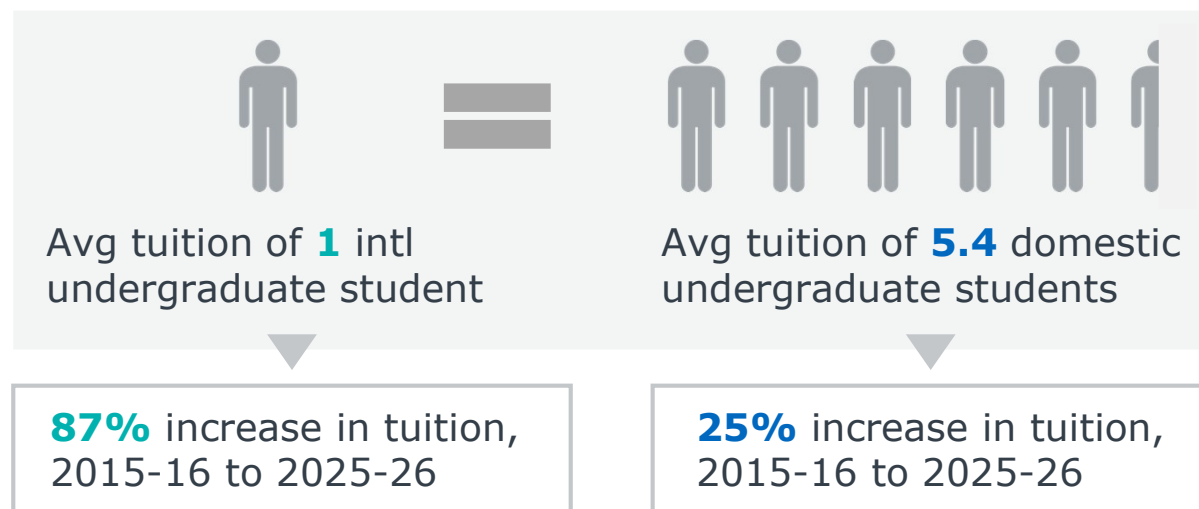


International Students Are Still a Minority of Enrollees...

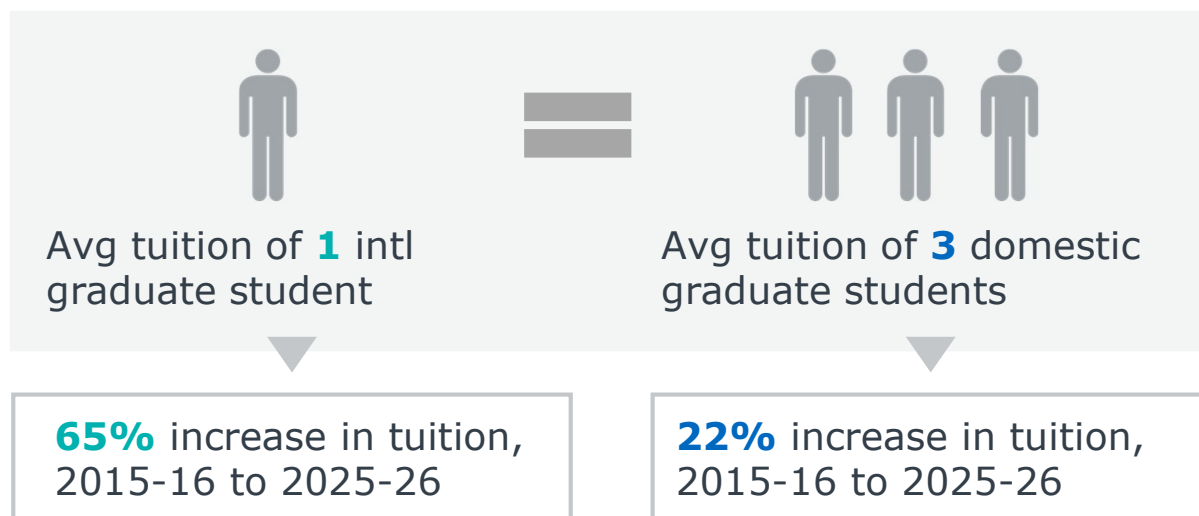
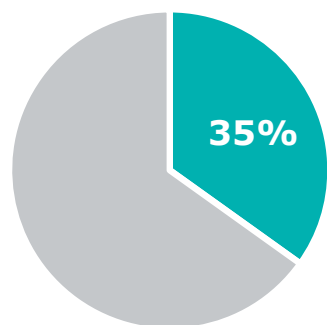
*Percent of Intl Undergrads
(Out of Total Undergrads)¹*



...But They Pay Over 3x More in Tuition Than Domestic Students²—and Face Faster Increases



*Percent of Intl Grads
(Out of Total Grads)¹*



1) For 2023-24 academic year.

2) For 2025-26 academic year.

York Feels the Sector Pressures Directly

Public figures from York's Multi-Year Budget Plan, 2026-27 to 2030-31

-7.0%

Total applications
vs. Fall 2024

-21.2%

International
applications vs.
Fall 2024

2028-29

Targeted year for
a balanced budget

\$10.2M

Planned for digital
transformation
and systems
renewal

What the plan says is structural

- Uncertainty in international enrolment and study-permit allocations
- Evolving provincial grant structures and prolonged underfunding
- Inflationary cost pressures that mitigations reduce but do not eliminate
- **Result: ongoing budget transformation, which IT is part of**



Students, Work, and Skills

How learner and workforce needs are changing

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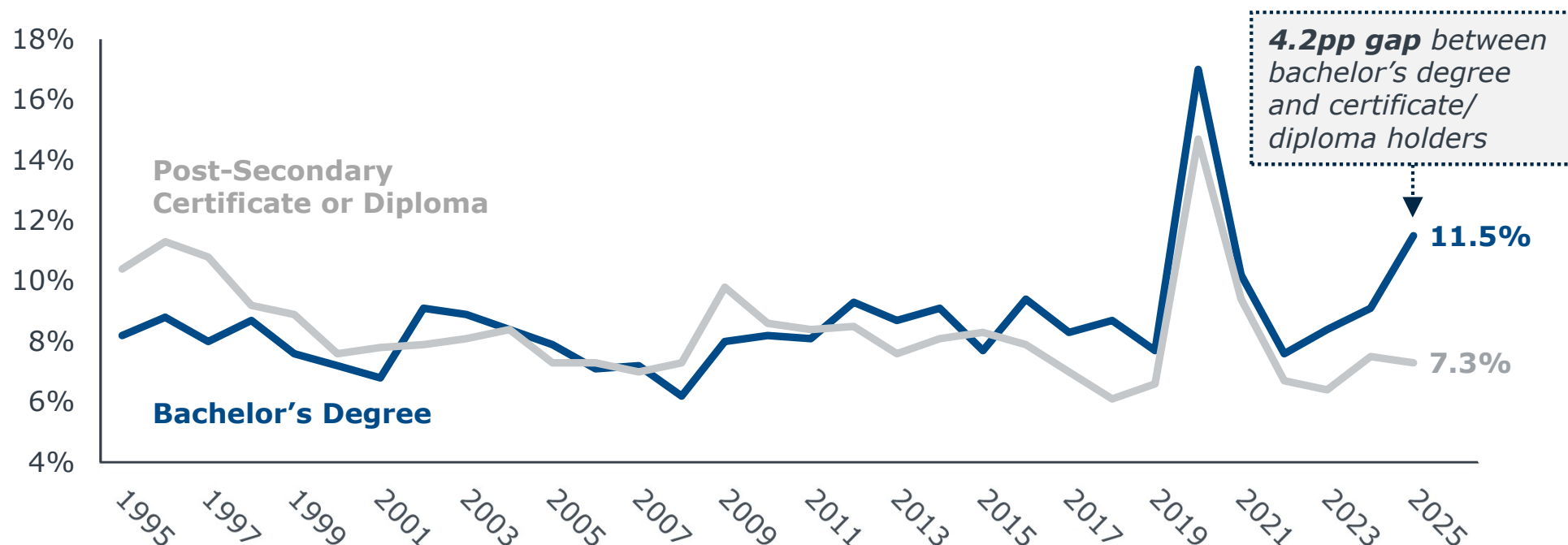
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Bachelor's Degree Becoming a Riskier Route?



Widest Ever Unemployment Rate Gap Between Bachelor's and Certificate Holders

Canadian Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, Ages 15-24



Plummeting Entry-Level Job Openings¹ Signal Even Tougher Times Ahead

-50%

Decline in entry-level job vacancies between 2024 and 2025

-65%

Fewer software engineering entry-level vacancies in Q1 2025 vs. 2022-2024 average

-49%

Fewer finance and accounting entry-level vacancies in Q1 2025 vs. 2022-2024 average

1) Jobs requiring a bachelor's degree and less than three years of experience.

Source: Labour Market Information Council, [Eligible Bachelors: Canada's Newest University Graduates Face an Increasingly Challenging Job Market](#); Statistics Canada, [Table 14-10-0022-01 Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate](#); EAB interviews and analysis.

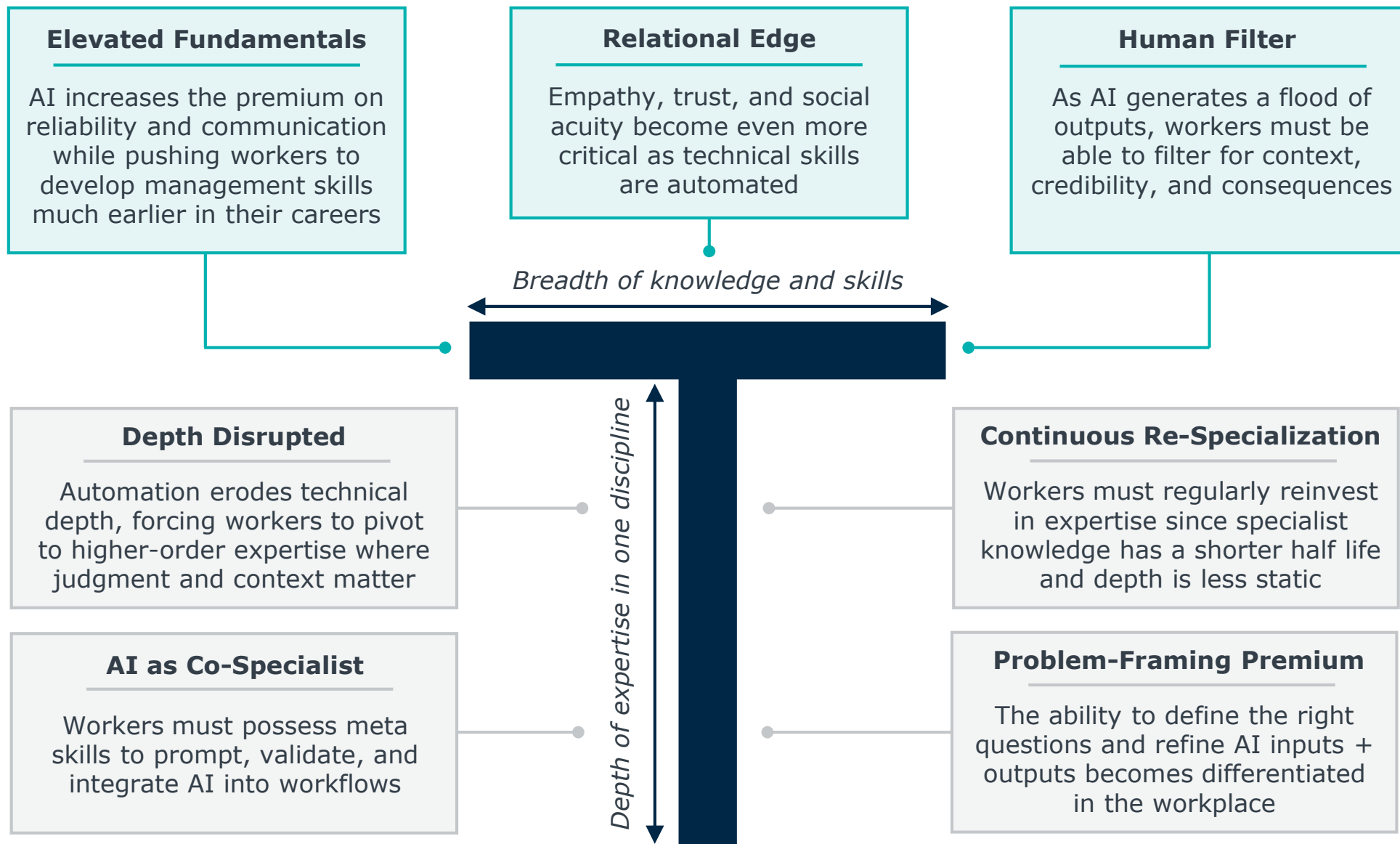
From Pyramid to Diamond



- Entry points are scarce, tightly gated, and reserved for already-skilled candidates
- Employers demand more polished, experienced hires from day one
- First jobs feel less like “learning roles” and more like immediate proving grounds

The New T-Shaped Professional

AI Is Reshaping What Is Required for Workplace Success





What This Means for York IT

Agility, responsible innovation, and shared governance

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3

From Sector Forces to IT Implications

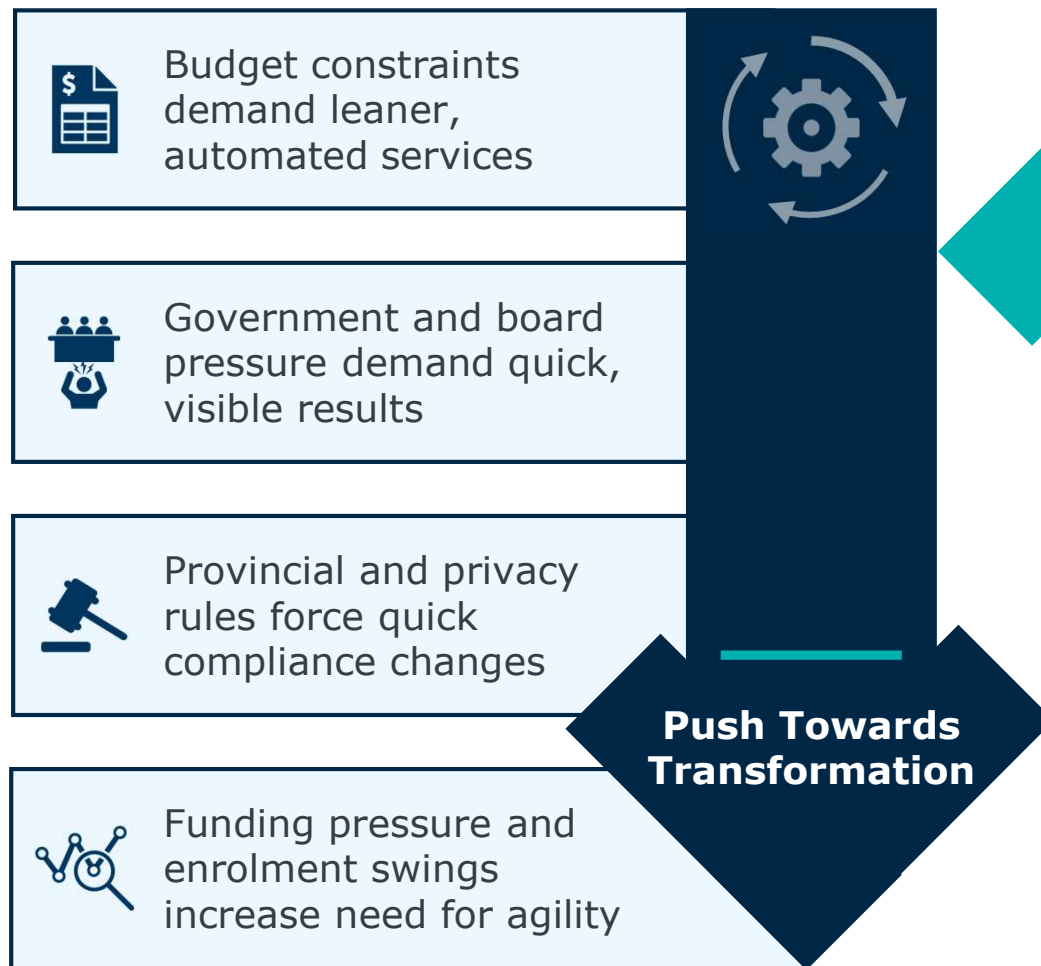
What each force asks of York IT, and where to start

	What it asks of IT	Where to start
Financial pressure	Free capacity by running core services leaner	Standardize, automate, selectively outsource
Public expectations	Prove security, reliability and value	Measurable service outcomes and risk reviews
Student and workforce needs	Seamless digital experience and trusted data	Fix high-friction processes, data quality
Artificial intelligence	Enable responsible innovation	Clear intake, pilots, shared governance

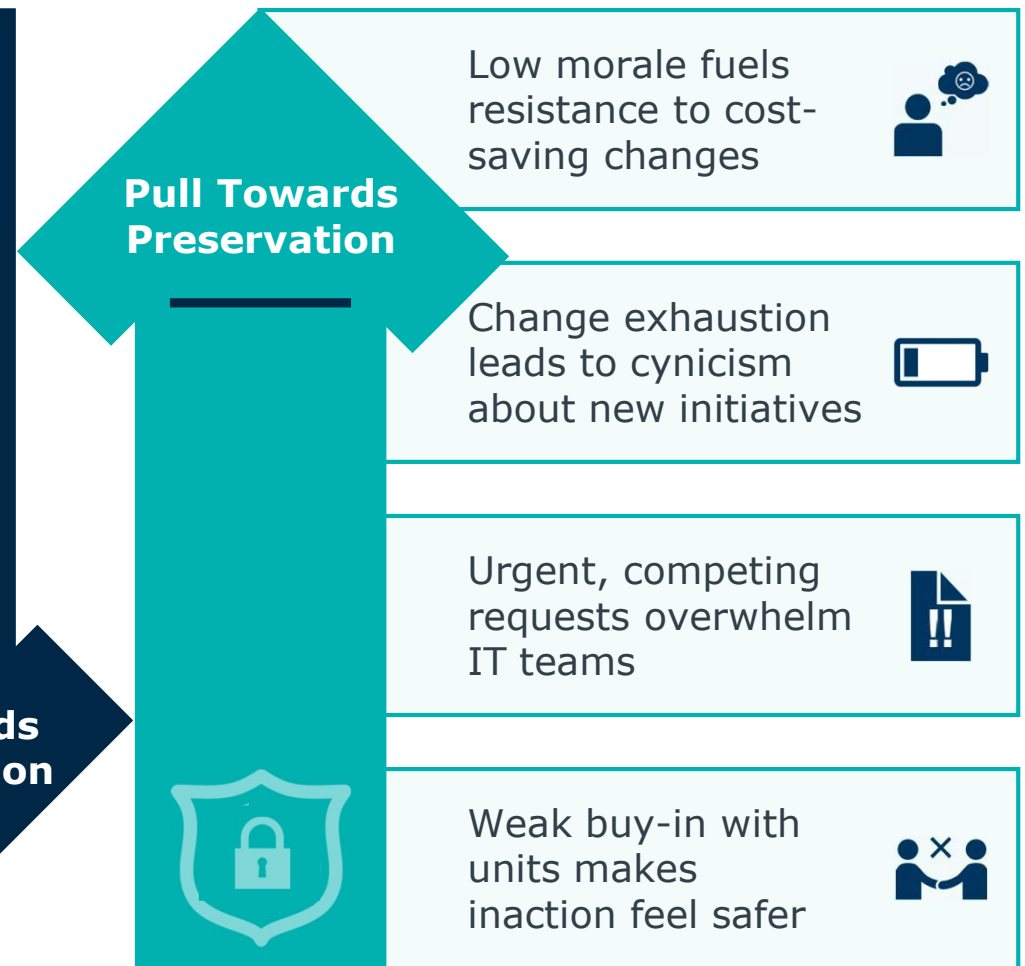
Navigating the Push and Pull



Financial, Market, and Policy Pressures Demand Bolder, Faster Changes...



...At the Same Time That Campus Communities Crave More Stability



Six Attributes of an Agile Institution



Can IT Make Smart Decisions Fast Enough?

Historic Tendencies

Committee Sprawl

Overlapping review boards and governance groups muddy responsibility and delay technology decisions.

Unclear Decision Authority

Ownership is split across IT, units and vendors, so requests stall between teams.

Repetitive Deliberation Cycles

Requests and architecture choices are revisited across multiple forums, resulting in re-litigation.

Consensus-Seeking Culture

An expectation that every unit agrees before moving extends deliberation and weakens outcomes.

New Capabilities

Clearly Scoped Mandates

Give each group a narrow question and a set timeframe to deliver a decision or recommendation.

Transparent Decision Rules

Name who owns each final call so it is clear who moves a request or project forward.

Tripwires for Action

Set deadlines for input and predefined thresholds (e.g., risk score, cost) that trigger a decision.

Constructive Conflict

Surface opposing views and tradeoffs early, then secure explicit commitment to the decision.

Is IT Willing to Stop Doing Things?

Historic Tendencies

Siloed Priorities

Each unit and IT team sets its own priorities, preventing intentional focus across the portfolio.

Expansive Strategic Planning

Long roadmaps and intake lists hide the tradeoffs between competing requests.

Shiny-Tool Pursuit

Teams chase new platforms and pilots that sidetrack core services and divert limited resources.

More With Less Mentality

IT keeps adding services, tools and projects without retiring any, stretching teams thin.

New Capabilities

North Star Vision



Tie IT priorities to a few institutional goals, and use them to say yes, no or not yet.

Tradeoff Discipline



Apply consistent criteria and openly communicate tradeoffs when launching and when retiring services.

Standardize, Then Differentiate



Standardize commodity services and invest where York's needs are genuinely distinct.

Less With Less Mentality



Intentionally retire low-value services and tools, and reward teams for saying no and focusing.

Do Our Structures Enable, Not Stifle, Change?

Historic Tendencies

Continuity Bias

Structures and incentives reward uptime and stability alone, discouraging experimentation.

Tradition Loyalty

Teams and units default to legacy systems and workarounds, slowing necessary change.

Ad Hoc Proposals and Approvals

One-off requests and non-standard intake create inconsistency and limit scalability.

Fixed Cost Rigidity

High fixed costs in legacy infrastructure, licences and staffing limit flexibility and trap resources.

New Capabilities

Innovation-Linked Incentives

Recognize and reward staff for piloting, automating and retiring work, not just keeping the lights on.

Change-Ready Leadership Pipelines

Prepare emerging IT leaders to guide units through change and uncertainty.

Innovation Incubators

Create one front door, small pilot funds and fast-track approval to test ideas quickly.

Adaptive Cost Structures

Keep costs flexible through cloud and shared services, flexible staffing and modular services that scale with demand.

Is IT Ready to Act Now for Outcomes Years Away?

Historic Tendencies

Near-Term Planning Cycles

IT planning focuses on this year's projects and tickets, neglecting long-term sustainability.

Reactive Governance Cycles

Decisions are made in response to incidents and requests, undermining long-term direction.

Crisis Response Hiring

Roles are filled reactively to plug gaps, sacrificing long-term skills needs.

Annual Delivery Metrics

Goals and recognition tied to one-year delivery discourage bold bets and long-range progress.

New Capabilities

Multi-Year Technology Roadmaps



Forecast licence, infrastructure and renewal costs to guide investments and anticipate pressures.

Cascaded Strategic Goals



Translate institutional priorities into aligned IT objectives that guide decisions at every level.

Skills-Driven Talent Planning



Plan hiring and development around future skills (data, automation, security), not just near-term gaps.

Recognition for Durable Value



Recognize teams for work that retires technical debt and creates durable value.

How York IT Can Build Agility and Resilience

Three places this community can make a difference

1

Improve processes

- Map the request-to-fulfilment path and remove hand-offs
- Automate repetitive work before adding headcount
- Standardize services across units to cut duplicate spend

2

Support responsible innovation

- Create one front door for technology and AI ideas
- Run small pilots with a clear path to production
- Set guardrails on data, security and vendor use

3

Use systems knowledge

- Retire technical debt that slows every change
- Connect data across systems for better decisions
- Partner with units as product managers, not order-takers

Agility starts with the processes and services you own

Three Takeaways

What to take back to your teams

1

The pressure is structural

Plan for sustained constraint, not a short cycle.

2

Agility is built, not declared

Clear decision rights, a willingness to stop, and change-ready systems.

3

IT's system knowledge is York's agility lever

Start with the processes and services you own.

Questions and Conversation

What questions or ideas
would you like to explore
together?





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